

I SAY, YOU FELLOWS!

TREVOR ADLEY CONSIDERS THE REMARKABLE
CAREER OF "OLD BOY" BOOK COLLECTOR AND
BIBLIOGRAPHER, W.O.G. LOFTS

When a writer has been as prolific as P. G. Wodehouse or Leslie Charteris, the collector has a problem. How can he (or she) be sure that he has acquired all of that author's works? The answer, of course, is to turn to a bibliography (or the relevant article in *Book and Magazine Collector*!). Most famous authors have at least one bibliography of their works drawn up, and in the case of really popular writers like John Buchan and Edgar Wallace, as many as three or four. The work of the bibliographer is of immense importance to readers, dealers and collectors, ensuring that there is no confusion over first editions, dustjackets and pseudonyms, and preventing rarer and less celebrated works from becoming 'lost' to posterity.

Probably the most celebrated bibliographer of modern times is Bill Lofts, who for over forty years has been devoted to the study of popular and juvenile literature. He is, of course, familiar to readers of *Book and Magazine Collector* for the articles he has written in collaboration with the late Derek Adley, on a wide range of subjects, ranging from Sax Rohmer and Sydney Horler, to 'Sexton Blake' and (most recently) Edgar Wallace.

As well as magazine work, however, he and Derek Adley also produced a number of definitive studies and bibliographies of writers such as Frank Richards and Leslie Charteris, all of which are now highly collectable in their own right. The 100th issue of this magazine seems an appropriate place to celebrate the life and work of one of BMC's most distinguished contributors, and a leading representative of that tireless but



often unsung group of men and women — bibliographers — without whom the business of book collecting would be a great deal more confusing than it already is!

William Oliver Guillemont Lofts — or Bill Lofts, as he is better known — was born in St. Marylebone, London, in 1923. After leaving school, he joined Solex (which later became the Zenith Carburettor Company) as an engineer, but his career was interrupted during the Second World War when he was called up into the army and posted to the steamy

jungles of Burma, where he was taken prisoner by the Japanese.

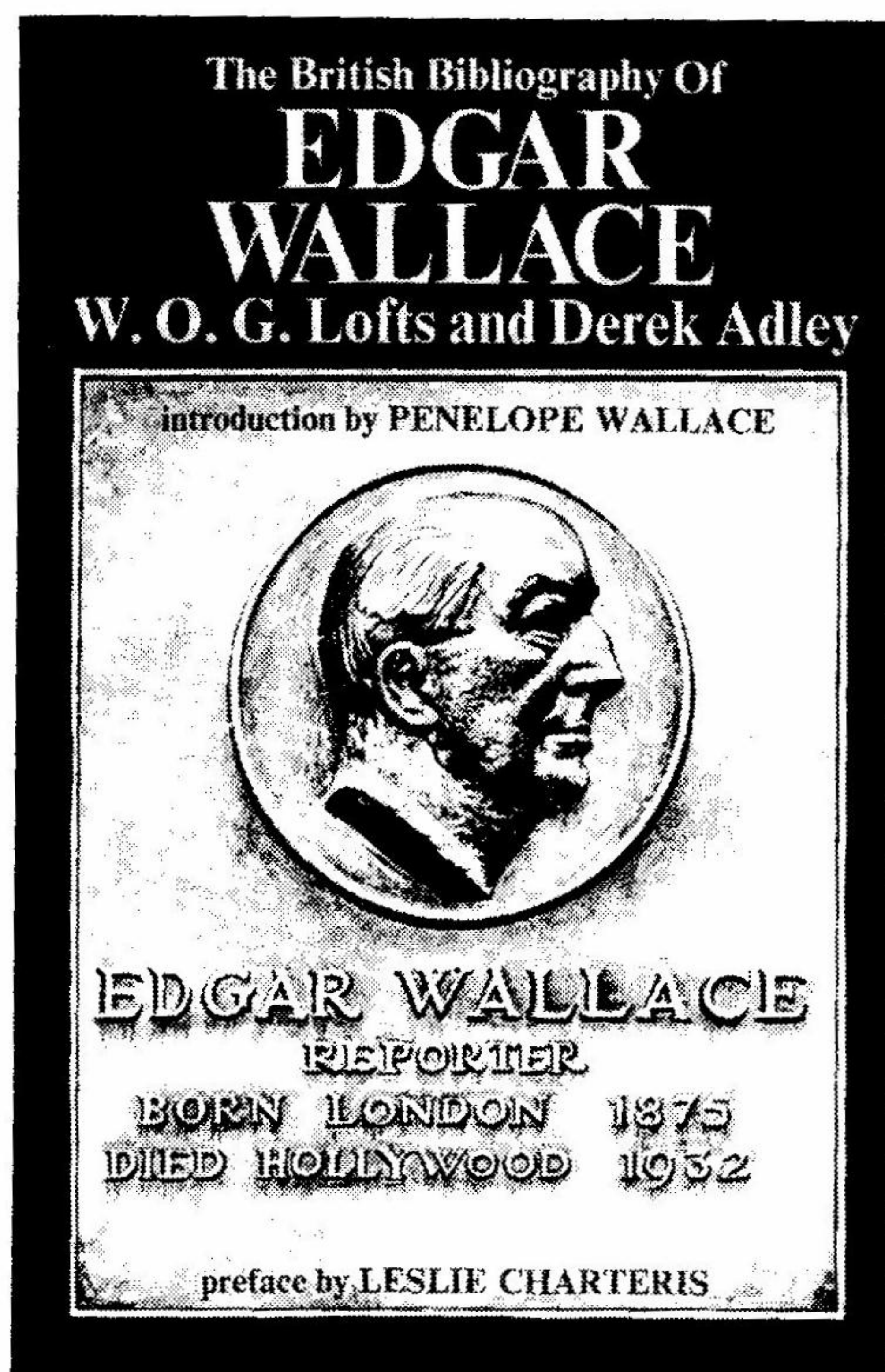
Although his captivity did not last long — he was soon freed in Allied counter attacks — it was then that a chance discovery re-ignited his boyhood passion for juvenile literature. In a dimly-lit corner of a disused Japanese hut, he found a crumpled copy of the 'Sexton Blake Library' — the great sleuth had reached even this far-flung outpost! On his return to England, he immediately set about collecting the magazine in earnest, along with later weeklies such as 'The Magnet', 'Gem' and 'Union Jack'.

RUMOURS

Bill was aware that many writers had contributed to these magazines, mostly under pseudonyms, and he had heard rumours that amongst them were some well-known authors, who had turned to boy's fiction to earn extra money. His curiosity aroused, he decided to find out more about the writers behind the 'Sexton Blake Library'.

By the early Fifties, Bill had become a member of the London Old Boys Book Club and a regular contributor to the club's magazine, *The Collector's Digest*. It was a piece in this magazine that brought Bill and his long-time collaborator, Derek Adley, together.

Bill wrote an article about John Hunter, who in the late 1930s had introduced readers of the 'Sexton Blake Library' to the memorable character, Captain Dack. Early in 1951, he received a letter from a young man of 23 who,



The British Bibliography of Edgar Wallace was published by Howard Baker in 1969, with a preface by the novelist Leslie Charteris.

like him, was interested in John Hunter. He wrote to ask whether Bill could provide him with some background information about the author. Bill was happy to oblige, and a

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THE MEN BEHIND BOYS' FICTION

W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley

A collective biography of all British authors who ever wrote for boys



Lofts and Adley's comprehensive study, *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction*, published in 1970.

correspondence grew up between the two of them. Neither could have known that this exchange of letters would be the beginning of a friendship and working partnership that would last almost forty years, and make the names of W. O. G. Lofts and Derek Adley famous throughout the book collecting world.

To the uninitiated, it might seem odd that a man like Bill in his late twenties should find this particular genre of literature so absorbing. 'Old Boy's' books had, of course, originally been written for schoolboys, and it was usually the case that once they had reached school leaving age, they abandoned these tales of youthful high jinx for more adult reading material. Bill, however, makes no apologies for his continuing interest in the genre, which he attributes to sheer nostalgia.

Bill's investigations into the writers of 'Sexton Blake' and other libraries require a combination of inspired guess work, experi-

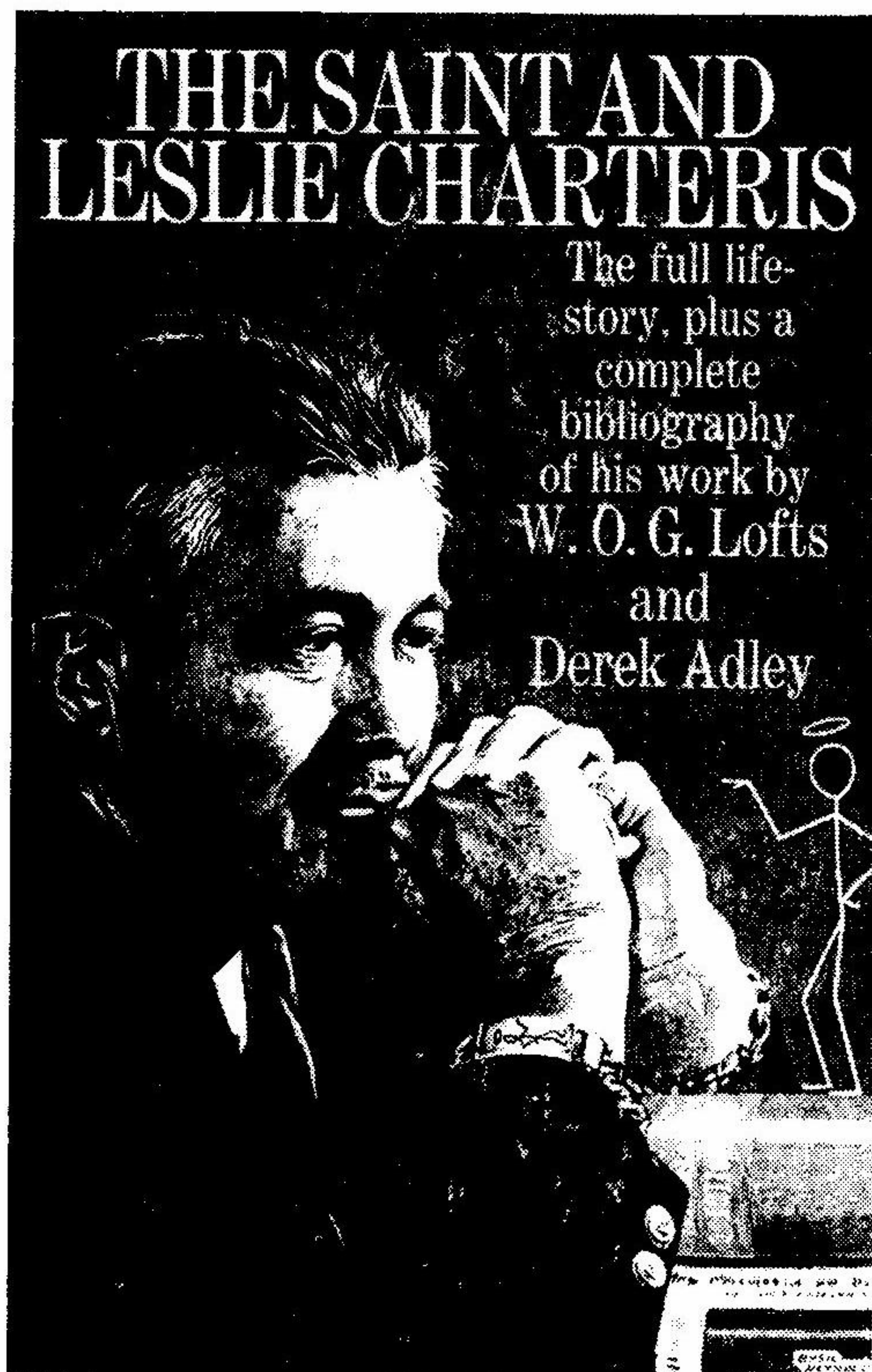
ence and sheer hard work. Often he has very little to go on, and has to rely on his intuition to give him a lead: sometimes it is nothing more than the sound of a pseudonym that gives him the vital clue as to an author's identity. His most important source is publishers' records, with the British Library and Somerset House providing essential background.

In 1968, Bill left Zenith Carburettorsto work as a freelance researcher for Fleetway House, the successor to Amalgamated Press (which, along with D. C. Thomson, had for a long time been the major publishers of juvenile fiction). This new post gave him access to the early Harmsworth, Amalgamated Press and Fleetway archives — a veritable gold-mine of information for the bibliographer! This was a rare privilege, not always granted to even the most senior of editors. Bill made the most of this opportunity, unearthing records and contracts which had not

Lofts and Adley combined biography and bibliography in this study of the great Leslie Charteris.

THE SAINT AND LESLIE CHARTERIS

The full life-story, plus a complete bibliography of his work by W. O. G. Lofts and Derek Adley



seen the light of day for decades, many of which detailed original publishing and wireless broadcasting rights.

In 1969, Bill's tireless efforts bore fruit with the publication of *The Old Boy's Book Collector*, co-written with Derek Adley. This was essentially an index of every comic, annual and boy's library known at the time, and was therefore a tremendous boon to collectors. Not surprisingly, the first impression — distributed by Norman Shaw — sold out very quickly, and the book was rapidly reprinted.

During his long association with 'Old Boy's' books, Bill has corresponded with, and met, practically every living author who has produced work in the genre. This has led him to a surprising discovery: that the more famous the writer, the more co-operative they usually are. The authors who have proved to be most difficult have almost always been the fledgling ones. With a wry smile, Bill recalls the time when he contacted a one-book author for an interview, to be told by the other that he was a "very busy man", and could only spare a few minutes of his valuable time.

Bill immediately withdrew his request for a meeting, pointing out that he, too, was very busy!

1969 also saw the publication of Bill's *The British Bibliography of Edgar Wallace* (with Derek Adley), still the standard work on the subject. A year later, his third book — *The Men Behind Boy's Fiction* — was published by Howard Baker. This volume — once again, co-written with Derek Adley — covered over two thousand writers, and included a huge amount of information not previously available to collectors. It remains an essential handbook for enthusiasts, and is as accurate as it is comprehensive.

Some people may be puzzled by the co-authorship of these books. The 'division of labour' was, however, quite straightforward: Bill's speciality was research, whilst Derek was responsible for the collation of the material turned up by his colleague, logging every detail in his own sophisticated filing system.

In 1971, Hutchinson published what is now the most collected of Bill's books, *The Saint and Leslie Charteris* (with Derek Adley).

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GREYFRIARS SINCE THE MAGNET



A BIBLIOGRAPHY BY W.O.G. LOFTS AND
DEREK J. ADLEY

EXLIBRIS

The bibliography Greyfriars since The Magnet was published by Happy Hours in 1983.

This is both a biography and a bibliography, describing the details of Charteris's extraordinary life, before going on to the formidable task of listing the various editions of his many novels and the enormous number of short stories he wrote for magazines in the Thirties, Forties and Fifties. This book — its dustjacket featuring a very attractive portrait of Charteris painted by Basil Reynolds — is an essential item for 'Saint' fans and collectors, with Fine copies currently selling for up to £20.

Bill is a close friend of Leslie Charteris, and was one of the guests at the House of Lords in May this year when Simon Templar's creator received the Cartier Diamond Dagger Award in recognition of his lifetime's achievement as a crime writer. A charming man, Charteris has always been very co-operative with Bill, who has in return undertaken personal research for the author. Charteris has even described Bill as the world's leading authority on 'The Saint' — a judgement that surely no one would dare argue with!

Of all Bill Lofts' books, however, the one that gave him the most pleasure to compile was his *The New Rupert Index*, published in 1979, and recently revised and updated by John Beck. Widely acclaimed as the definitive guide to the subject, this book lists all the known 'Rupert Bear' stories and annuals which have appeared since Mary Tourtel first created the character in 1921. Whilst researching this book, Bill spent many happy hours thumbing through copies of the *Daily Express* in the British Library at Colindale. He had always been a big 'Rupert' fan, having followed the little bear's adventures as a boy; while Derek Adley preferred the rival tales of 'Teddy Tail' in the *Daily Mail*.

MYSTERIES

Bill's reputation for solving literary mysteries has prompted one editor to describe him as the "Sir Bernard Spilsbury of 'Old Boy's' books". Amongst his more notable coups in this field was the rediscovery of 'Man Overboard', an all-but-forgotten story by the young Winston Churchill which was first published in *Harmsworth's Magazine* in 1899. At Bill's instigation, the story was reprinted, for which he was paid the princely sum of £25.

But Bill's endeavours have not been restricted to the world of books. Indeed, the achievement which gave him most pleasure was a piece of non-literary detective work, when a friend asked for his assistance in discovering the whereabouts of a long-lost sister. There was little to go on, just a few letters signed 'Marion' or 'Marion R.', with postmarks from the North of England.

Bill set about the task with his usual determination. After an initial check of the records produced no leads, he sat down and thought the problem out, finally deciding that the 'R' in the woman's name might stand for 'Rutherford', a common surname in the North. He then re-checked the records, noting down all the 'Marion Rutherford's who were born near to the approximate birth-date of the missing woman.

When he'd prepared a shortlist, he sent letters to the last known addresses of all the women on it, but for three months got no favourable replies. Then, out of the blue, he

received a letter from Africa — the long lost sister had been found! She had left Britain at an early age, and had only just received Bill's letter, which had been forwarded to her!

In fact, Bill is an enthusiastic genealogist, having drawn up several family trees, including one which stretches back to 1490, with several 'sub-trees' and derivations of the family name. This is not such a radical departure for him, as it requires the same methods of research and deduction as his literary work. Bill's interest in the past has also led him to investigate several haunted houses in Britain.

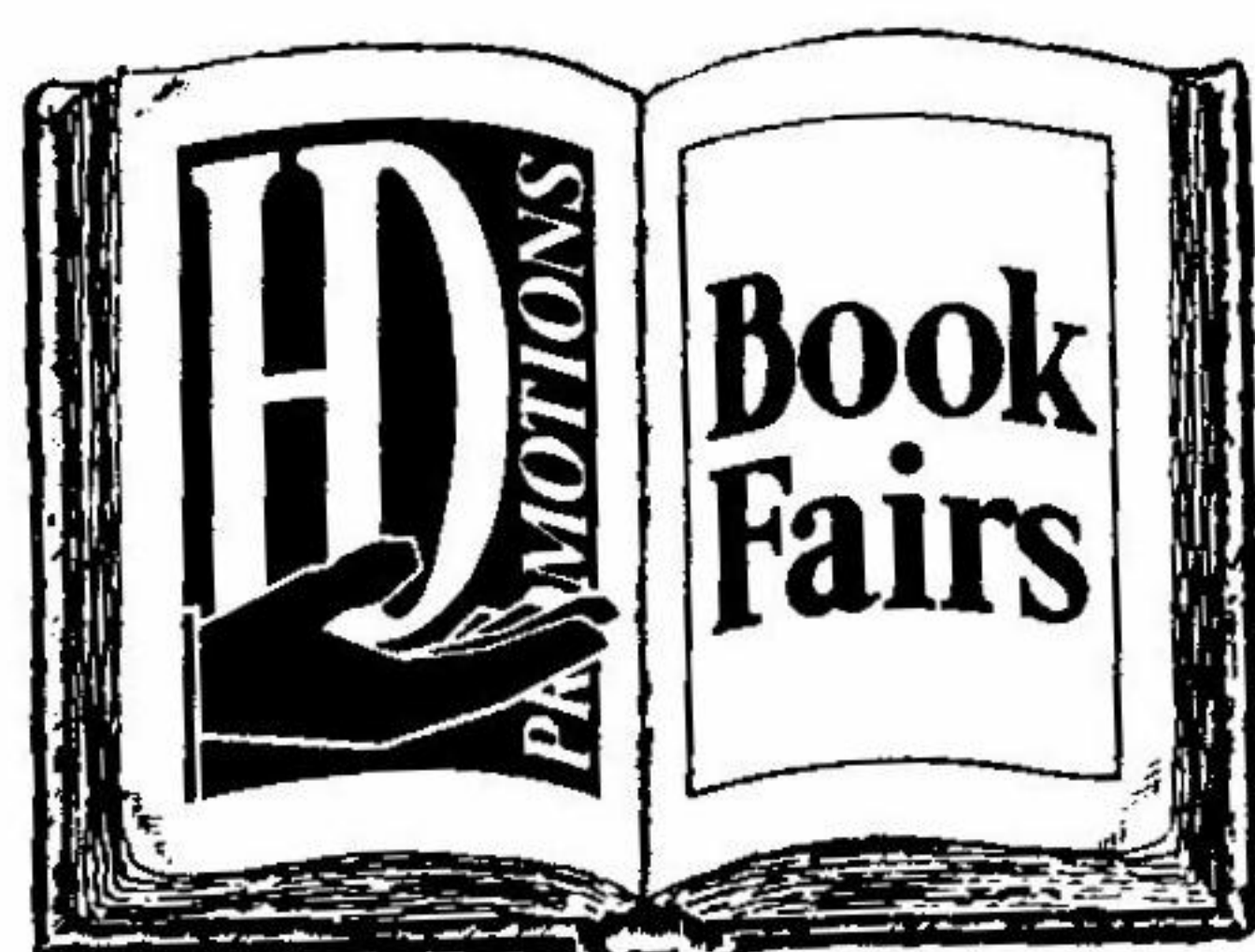
But what of Bill Lofts the collector? Not surprisingly, Bill has a huge library of books and magazines, including several early volumes of 'The Saint', 'William' and Edgar Wallace stories. In fact, he has what is thought to be the largest private collection of juvenile and popular fiction in the world, mostly first editions in original dustjackets. Among the rarer items is a copy of *Boy's and Girl's Penny Magazine* from 1832 — not even the British Library has such an early edition! Recently, however, Bill's collection has become too big

for his Marylebone flat, and he has had to dispose of a number of his books: an agonising situation for such a devoted bibliophile!

Bill still regularly contributes articles to a variety of journals, not least this one! He continues to support the London Old Boy's Book Club (of which he was chairman in 1966), and, as Life President of its Cambridge equivalent, still attends their monthly meetings.

Bill's flat is full of mementoes of his work. A framed photograph of him and four friends hangs above his TV, a reminder of a boat trip they took along the Thames to Oxford in imitation of one undertaken by the Famous Five some years before. And original illustrations of Rupert Bear, Mickey Mouse and William adorn his mantelpiece.

Despite his encyclopaedic knowledge of children's fiction, Bill has never tried to write any, believing that the ability to do so is a gift which cannot be acquired. He has a low opinion of modern boy's publications, which are almost entirely made up of comic strips in which the text plays only a secondary role to the artwork. In contrast, the 'Old Boy's'



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Royal National Hotel, Woburn Place, London WC1

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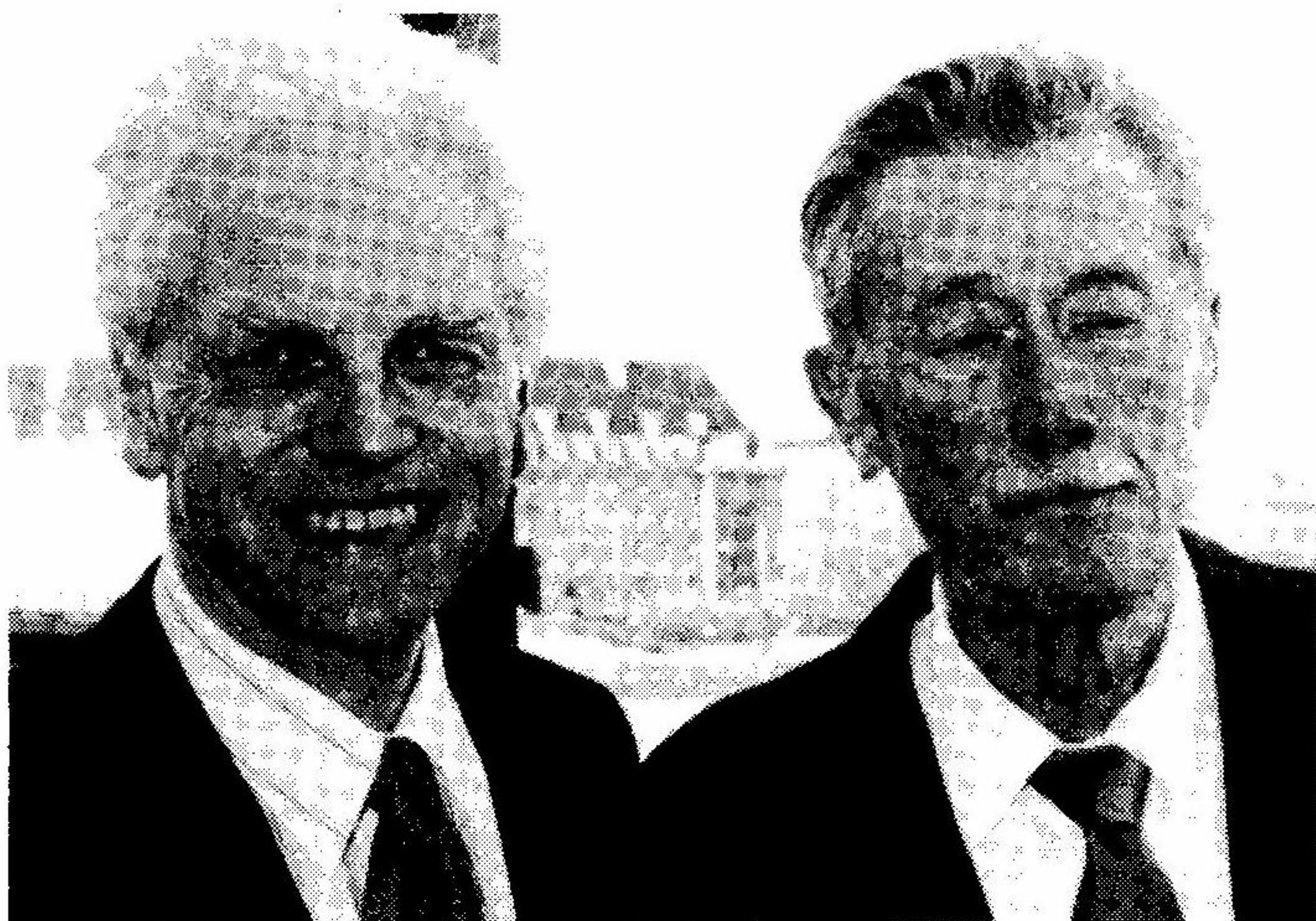
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Peter Lovesey with Leslie Charteris during the recent ceremony at which the creator of 'The Saint' was presented with the Cartier Diamond Dagger Award.

At the time of Derek Adley's sudden death in March 1991, he and Bill were working on an *Enid Blyton Index*, and had already unearthed many lost stories. Sadly, that book has now been abandoned, and Bill currently has no major project in hand. He continues to write regular articles, however, and to do research on behalf of other writers (most notably Peter Haining and Jack Adrian), and it can't be too long before another author or fictional character gets the 'Lofts treatment', and

magazines contained 'proper' prose stories, enlivened by occasional illustrations. He also believes that a lot of the humour has disappeared from boy's papers, and been replaced by an aggressiveness which he blames on the influence of American strips like 'Batman' and 'Superman'.

becomes the subject of one of his definitive studies. As it is, he has already won the undying gratitude of collectors everywhere for his work on Leslie Charteris, Edgar Wallace, Frank Richards and many others, work that has proved to be of enormous value to his fellow book lovers.

W.O.G. LOFTS UK AND US BIBLIOGRAPHY

A guide to current values of first editions in Fine condition with dustjackets (where appropriate).

HARDBACKS (with Derek Adley)

THE BRITISH BIBLIOGRAPHY OF EDGAR WALLACE (Howard Baker, 1969)	£15-£20
THE MEN BEHIND BOY'S FICTION (Howard Baker, 1970)	£10-£15
THE SAINT AND LESLIE CHARTERIS (Hutchinson, 1971)	£15-£20
THE WORLD OF FRANK RICHARDS (Howard Baker, 1975)	£8-£10

PAPERBACKS (with Derek Adley)

THE OLD BOY'S BOOK COLLECTOR (Norman Shaw, 1969)	£3-£4
D. C. THOMSON AND JOHN LENG ANNUALS, 1921-1965 (bibliography) (Adley/Lofts, 1975)	£3-£4
THE RUPERT INDEX (bibliography) (Norman Shaw, 1979)	£3-£4
ditto (new edition: revised and updated by John Beck) (John Beck, 1991)	in print £8.50
WILLIAM (bibliography) (Norman Shaw, 1980)	£4-£5
THE HOTSPUR (bibliography) (Cadwallender, 1982)	£2-£3
GEM CATALOGUE (bibliography) (Norman Shaw, 1983)	£2-£3
GREYFRIARS SINCE THE 'MAGNET' (bibliography) (Happy Hours, 1983)	£2-£3
THE DETECTIVE WEEKLY (bibliography) (Happy Hours, 1987)	£2-£3
BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY (bibliography) (Adley/Lofts, 1987)	£3-£4
THE THRILLER (bibliography) (A. & B. Whitworth, 1990)	£3-£4

MISCELLANEOUS

'MAGNET' No.1. With a foreword by W. O. G. Lofts (facsimile) (Fleetway Publications, 1965)	£1-£2
THE ADVENTURES OF HERLOCK SHOLMES (Dispatch Box Press, U.S., 1976)	£3-£5
THE 'MAGNET' COMPANION (Howard Baker, 1976)	£3-£5
TIGER TIMS OWN (Howard Baker, 1986)	£3-£5